

What's the Difference Between All-Over Hair Color, Highlights, and Retouches?

It's easy to feel a little overwhelmed when it comes to hair color, especially when telling your hairstylist what you really want. What's "hair contouring"? What about "balayage"? There are too many new hair color terms to keep up with, it seems. But luckily, all-over hair color, highlights, and retouches are the three basic hair color techniques to know. To help you with your quest for the perfect hair color, we're going to define each one in no uncertain terms.

Let's start with the most basic hair coloring process.

All-Over Hair Color

Also commonly called "single-process hair color," all-over color is a one-step process that involves coating the hair with a single shade.

Within all-over/single process hair color, there are three levels: semi-permanent, demi-permanent, and permanent.

As their names suggest, they vary in strength and in how long they last. Permanent color, obviously, lasts the longest. It's also typically the only all-over color that employs ammonia (or ammonia derivatives), meaning that it's a little tougher on your strands, but it can lighten or darken your hair up to 4 levels in either direction.

Demi-permanent hair color is far gentler on your tresses, but in exchange, it doesn't last quite as long. It generally only lasts 24-26 shampoos.

Of course, you can probably guess by now that semi-permanent hair color is the gentlest—and the fastest to fade. If you're not quite ready to commit to a color, you can always try out a semi-permanent shade before you take the plunge.

Highlights

In essence, hair highlights are meant to mimic the effects of the sun on your hair. You know that perfect, shimmery, sun-kissed look of your youth? Highlights achieve

that feat without all that pesky sun damage. Who wants wrinkles in the pursuit of bouncy, beachy hair? Not us!

There are (at least) a couple of ways to highlight your hair. The most common way to highlight hair—and the oldest trick in the book—involves applying bleach to the hair and wrapping it in aluminum foil.

When done properly, this style of highlighting can look as natural or unnatural as you want. You can ask for chunky, obvious highlights if you're looking for a dramatic effect.

On the flipside, you can ask for subtle, blended highlights with lowlights mixed in for a more natural, multidimensional look.

However, if you really want your hair to be a work of art, balayage is your best bet. This method of highlighting hair has been around for literal decades (since the 70's), but it's just recently become incredibly popular, thanks to a bevy of celebrities who have been seen sporting the look.

Balayage, also known as “pintura,” is essentially freehand hair painting. Because each section is highlighted by hand, it ends up looking as natural as the sun-kissed highlights you took for granted as a kid.

Retouches

Last, but certainly not least, hair color retouches are a girl's best friend. That dreaded regrowth that you see in between salon visits? Retouches work that mess out.

“How?” you ask.

Instead of dyeing the entirety of your hair every time you need a little cover up, retouches simply dye the root.

Because you're not coating the length of the strands, you end up sparing the ends of your hair the damage they would otherwise suffer.

One important thing to keep in mind about retouches: the roots of your hair behave a little bit differently from the rest of your hair. Your roots are constantly exposed to the warmth of your scalp. This does two major things: it makes the hair at your root extremely soft, and it also makes it more receptive to coloring.

Why is this worth noting?

If you're not careful, you could end up with wonky roots that don't quite match up with the rest of your hair color tonally. There's no rule that says you can't play with all three types of hair color. Find what works for you, and Always Be Fantastic!